



**Supporting the Vision: Mayor's Plan to Integrate the  
District of Columbia's Social Services Information Systems with the  
Family Court of the DC Superior Court**



**Submitted by Mayor Anthony A. Williams**

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Court of the DC Superior Court**



***EXECUTIVE SUMMARY***

***Supporting the Vision: Mayor's Plan to Integrate the District of Columbia's Social Services and Related Information Systems with the Family Court of the DC Superior Court***

**ABSTRACT**

*This report presents the Mayor's plan to integrate District Social Services and Related Information Systems with the information systems of the Family Court. Central to the plan to integrate systems with the Family Court is the Safe Passages Information Suite (SPIS). SPIS will link disparate health and human services databases across the District to provide individual case managers with critical information regarding cross-agency servicing of children, families and individuals within the District health and human services system. SPIS will provide District leadership with the ability to generate cross-agency, aggregate reports to enable monitoring and improvement of the overall District health and human services system performance. SPIS will be built on secure, flexible technological architecture. As SPIS is developed and built, the District and Family Court will continue to focus on improving collaboration through five (5) automated integration priorities: Calendar Management, Notification, Electronic Document Management, Inquiry-level Sharing of Critical Case Information, and Reporting. This report also details the District approach to planning and managing computer system integration projects. Finally, the report presents the Mayor's spending plan pursuant to Congress' mandate to improve integration with the Family Court.*

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**Introduction**

This report, *Supporting the Vision: Mayor's Plan to Integrate the District of Columbia's Social Services and Related Information Systems with the Family Court of the DC Superior Court*, is submitted to the Congress of the United States pursuant to § 11-1106(c) of the District of Columbia Family Court Act of 2001 (the Act). This report describes the Williams Administration's plan for the integration of District of Columbia (District) information technology (IT) systems with those of the Family Court of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia (the Family Court). This plan builds on the Mayor's and the District's commitment, dating well before the passage of the Act, to:

- Coordinate services District-wide for vulnerable persons, to be supported by integrated IT systems as envisioned by the Mayor's Safe Passages Goals; and
- Reform child welfare efforts currently underway, including ensuring safety and promoting more timely movement to permanent families for abused and neglected children.

## **Key Findings**

This report draws on multiple sources of information to provide both a context and detail on the District's plan to enable electronic information exchange between and among the District's health and human services and the Family Court of the DC Superior Court. This report draws on multiple sources, including:

- A review of the missions, interactions with the Court, and current IT environments of the critical District agencies;
- A review of key elements of the District's unique health and human services and information technology operating environments and of the progress to date of organizational change and information technology strategies responsive to that environment;
- A review of national best practices for states that are seeking to link Family Courts or related court entities with Executive Branch health and human services agencies.

Key findings from these reviews include:

- Both the national experience and the District's experience highlight a range of challenges for integrated information systems in health and services. Nationally, the experience of states seeking to connect court systems and health and services systems highlights the challenges of multiple incompatible systems, users who may be intimidated by new technology and reluctant to use it without considerable training, and inconsistent quality assurance leading to a generalized mistrust of system security, application capability, and data integrity. Elements of all these challenges can be seen in the District's history; in addition, the District's unique human services environment – for example, the dual role of its agencies in providing both state-level policy and oversight and local level direct service delivery, and the court orders that significantly affect operations in a number of agencies – poses its own challenges.
- The national experience suggests that while there are not yet models for the comprehensive integration of courts and social service agencies, there are models for individual short-term solutions to particular problems. Specifically, the national experience suggests that there are currently no robust, two-way electronic information exchanges between social services agencies and court systems, although some states are, like the District, at the beginning stages of planning technological integration. At the same time, many states have found other

means to share information, such as inquiry rights for the child welfare system to access judicial data or for judges to access limited information in the child services system.

- The District's experience of successful strategies for promoting high quality services to vulnerable persons through increased integration of services and systems suggests that a number of best practices, consistent with the national experience, apply to this jurisdiction. On the organizational and service delivery side, the District's successes have come from a balanced strategy, which has placed a priority on assuring competent and effective management within individual agencies to fulfill their operational mandates and a priority on cross-agency collaboration to improve services. A focus on results has linked the two parts of the strategy.
- On the information systems side, the approach has been similarly sophisticated, reflecting the fact that each of the agency systems is designed around the unique business purpose, processes, and reporting requirements of the individual agency being supported (and often in compliance with specific Federally defined criteria). The District's approach to IT planning, which has been driven in part by the complexity of the environment, is "plan big, start small, ramp fast": that is, spend enough time at the beginning to ensure that the correct technological solution is being pursued and that the myriad of stakeholders see the vision in a consistent way.
- In designing the specific next steps, it is important to take into account that the interactions of the agencies with the Family Court vary a great deal in frequency and in the amount of information that must be transferred back and forth. Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA), Department of Human Services/Youth Services Administration (DHS/YSA), Office of Corporation Counsel (OCC), and Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) have the most frequent and extensive interactions. For example, CFSA and OCC are engaged in up to 1500 abuse and neglect hearings a month with the Family Court, and the effectiveness of information exchange around these hearings is critical to children's safety and well being.
- Except for MPD, all the other agencies reviewed are currently exchanging information with the court primarily through manual exchanges and the passing of hard copy reports. This information exchange is problematic for everyone, particularly in regard to basic elements of the system such as calendaring and dispositions. In the child welfare context, these problems create barriers to children's prompt movement to permanency – for example, when attorneys or social workers do not have full information about hearing schedules and

therefore do not provide full and timely information to judges - and therefore need urgent attention.

### **Mayor's Plan for Integration of District IT Systems with Family Court IT Systems**

Based on this information regarding the challenges and the best practices strategies that can be discerned from the District's own experience and the national experience, the District proposes a plan that:

- Is guided by the core goals of the Family Court legislation: ensuring children's safety, enabling children to move promptly to permanent families (consistent with the District and Federal Adoption and Safe Families Acts), and improving responsiveness to families, and individuals served by multiple agencies in other actions and proceedings in the Family Court by integrating services in a manner responsive to each families' particular needs and strengths;
- Reflects a sense of urgency about achieving those goals and at the same time takes a long-run perspective;
- Combines immediate short-term steps that will make an early difference to children and families with a long-term vision (Safe Passages Information Suite) that provides fuller integration of services across key District agencies;
- Selects five short-term priority functions for Family Court integration based on the national experience of what works, the immediate concerns expressed by District agencies, and the relevance of each function to ensuring the coordination and delivery of services to individuals and families served by the Family Court . The five priorities selected through this process are: Calendar Management, Notification, Electronic Document Management, Inquiry-Level Sharing of Critical Case Information, and Reporting;
- Implements the long-term vision of the Safe Passages Information Suite, and integrates the specific priority functions identified above into this longer-term approach;
- Draws on project management best practices to coordinate the short-term and long-term strategies.

## **REPORT SUMMARY**

This report presents definition of the processes necessary to accomplish inter-agency and intra-agency access and sharing of critical service information related to individuals and families involved in certain proceedings before the Family Court. The Mayor's Plan also recognizes the importance of aggregate tracking of outcomes in order for District and Family Court leadership to evaluate the overall health and human services system and ensure continuous process improvement. The plan has been developed to create a District IT environment optimized for integration with the Integrated Justice Information System (IJIS) being planned to support the Superior Court of the District of Columbia.

This report is comprised of the following sections:

- Summary of the Current District Health and Human Services Environment
- Analysis of the Current District Health and Human Services Information Technology Environment
- Integration within the District Health and Human Services Information Systems: Safe Passages Information Suite
- Plan for the Integration of District Computer Systems with the Family Court Computer Systems
- District Approach to Computer System Integration Project Planning and Management
- Mayor's Spending Plan for Family Court Integration

## **Summary of the Current Health and Human Services Environment**

### ***District Agencies with Key Roles in Serving Family Court Clients***

Understanding the District of Columbia's social services delivery system and how the agencies interact with the District's Family Court is crucial to creating an information system integration plan. The District's social services delivery system is unique. The governmental structure of the District requires many agencies to simultaneously provide both traditional state-level oversight and local-level service delivery.

In order to enhance centralized coordination across social service agencies, Mayor Williams has empowered the Deputy Mayor for Children, Youth, Families and Elders (DMCYFE) to provide strategic direction for the agencies providing critical services to some of the District's most vulnerable residents. The key health and human services agencies within the DMCYFE cluster, critical to the implementation of the Family Court Act of 2001, include the following:

- Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA)
- Department of Mental Health (DMH)
- Department of Human Services (DHS), including:
  - o Family Services Administration (FSA)
  - o Office of Early Childhood Development (OECD)
  - o Income Maintenance Administration (IMA)
  - o Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities Administration (MRDDA)
  - o Youth Services Administration (YSA)
- Department of Health (DOH), including:
  - o Addiction Prevention and Recovery Administration (APRA)
  - o Vital Records Division of the State Center for Health Statistics

Several other critical agencies outside of the DMCYFE cluster are specifically listed in the Family Court Act of 2001. These agencies include: the Office of Corporation Counsel (OCC), Metropolitan Police Department (MPD), DC Public Schools, and the DC Housing Authority (DCHA). Improved coordination between these agencies, and agencies under the DMCYFE cluster, is instrumental to the successful implementation of the Act. This report notes each of the listed agencies' interactions with the Family Court.

### ***District Health and Human Services Improvement Strategy***

As the District continues to distance itself from a legacy of "silos" of independent agency operations marked by Receiverships and Court Exit Agreements, several notable health and human service reform initiatives have emerged under the current Administration. The DMCYFE *Safe Passages Children and Youth Action Plan* has produced many of these programs, including Neighborhood Places, the Child Safety Net Coordination System, and Transform (T-9) Schools. The Mayor has also provided personal



leadership the establishment of the D.C. Youth Investment Collaborative, and the establishment of the Office of Medicaid Public Provider Reform.

### **Analysis of the Current District Health and Human Services Information Technology Environment**

Understanding the individual IT components in place at each agency is an essential first-step to planning integration strategies. There is a wide disparity among District health and human services agencies in how well they are supported by electronic information systems. Where systems do exist, they have usually been designed, implemented and optimized around the unique business purpose, processes and reporting requirements of the individual agency being supported. This report provides a summary of the IT capabilities in place at each of the District agencies affected by the Family Court Act.

Successful implementation of individual agency IT systems enables organizations to take the next step in technological maturity. The next level involves automated information sharing across organizational boundaries with partner agencies. The District, through its Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, is in the process of implementing an integrated, citywide Justice Information System (JUSTIS) in stages. JUSTIS allows key criminal justice and related organizations to view limited information from each other's systems on a "need to know", inquiry-only basis. This report provides an overview of JUSTIS. As discussed within the report, JUSTIS provides some important opportunities for information sharing for certain District health and human services agencies. However, JUSTIS does not appear to provide the full framework for the long-term solution for system integration within these agencies.

This report details the parallel evolution of the DMCYFE concept for the Safe Passages Information Suite and OCTO's efforts towards city-wide IT integration. The internal District expertise regarding IT best practices in the fields of health and human services gained through the Safe Passages program compliments a District IT environment pre-conditioned by OCTO for successful development and implementation of the Mayor's long-term plan for health and human services IT integration, as well as integration with the Family Courts.

### **Integration Within the District Health and Human Services Information Systems: Safe Passages Information Suite**

The District IT integration strategy is exemplified in the Safe Passages Information Suite. SPIS will service the three primary groups of stakeholders within the District social service system as follows:

- **Case Managers:** Enable the automated exchange of individual case management records to provide a cross-functional view of a person's needs and the services already being received; enable case managers to access accurate information on service providers and community services needed by their clients;
- **Agency Administrators:** Provide aggregate, flexible, powerful reporting capabilities that leverage data across multiple District agency databases in order to monitor effectiveness of service delivery and perform trend analysis;
- **District Residents:** Provide increased access to information on available public and private social services.

This report provides the technological architecture for SPIS. The complex structure will be enabled by Enterprise Application Integration (EAI) middleware and anchored by data marts built on Oracle databases. SPIS will create a flexible technological environment that meets the District's most critical integration needs.

The District based its plans for the business design of SPIS on functional best practice research. A strategy of feature-based analysis was employed, extracting the differentiating features of best practice programs and envisioning their applicability within the District environment, and then re-engineering the features to perform even better. The resultant business design (SPIS) is expected to be well within the functionality of typical studied systems, indicating moderate to low technical risk. Security and confidentiality are primary considerations in the development of SPIS.

### ***Functionality of SPIS***

There are four primary components of SPIS driving its functionality:

- **Common Identifier for the receipt of District services:** In order to cross-match data from disparate health and human services databases, it is necessary to create a common identifier for a person receiving District government services. This identifier will be a unique auto-generated number that will be assigned to each person registered for District supported services.
- **SPIS Data Marts:** Data marts containing basic case information will be established for each participating health and human service program or participating agency where common

information is needed by more than one agency. The data marts will keep each of the individual agency's data separate. Data from the separate data marts can be aggregated to create analytical, District-wide reports.

- **Case Management Information Sharing Portal (CMISP):** CMISP will enable users to view case/service management activities of clients in other District agencies, based on specifically identified IT database "roles and rights" based on "need to know." A user will be able to utilize an Internet browser to query the SPIS Data Marts over the DC WAN for secure, controlled access to individual case files and information. This query will represent a one-way data exchange, i.e., a user from one agency cannot enter or edit data in another agency's database.
- **Community Resource Information Repository:** DHS is implementing an Internet-accessible interface to the District's most comprehensive database of social service resources and supports. This information is gathered and maintained by staff of the DHS AnswersPlease operation. "AnswersPlease Online" (<http://AnswersPlease.dc.gov>) will give users access to location and availability of service resources through simple search mechanisms similar in functionality to Internet search engines. The system is designed for use by both the public and District case workers. A specialized level of access will also be provided to District case workers and administrators requiring information levels not available to the general public.

### **Plan for Integration of District Computer Systems with the Family Court Computer Systems**

The SPIS strategy will be adapted to accommodate the broadened mandate of IT integration set forth in the Family Court Act. The Integrated Justice Information System (IJIS) will be implemented in support of the Family Court by September 2003. IJIS will be a single point of integration for the District agencies' interface to the Courts. A single system simplifies the integration challenges with the Court and provides opportunities for reduced cost and higher quality of integration when compared to integration with multiple legacy systems.

Presently, there is minimal sharing of on-line information between District agencies and the Courts. After discussing the challenges that must be navigated in developing enhanced IT integration, this report presents the five (5) integration priorities between the District and the Family Court. The report proposes short-term strategies for improving integration within these areas, as well as the long-term treatment of these priorities within SPIS. The five integration priorities are as follows:

- **Calendar Management:** The scheduling congestion relieved by the reorganization of the Court can be further alleviated by the utilization of IT to ensure that all District case workers are aware of their court commitments and that potential scheduling conflicts are identified as quickly as possible.
- **Notification:** Automated notification of case events would assure that all participating case workers across organizational boundaries are aware of current status, upcoming important dates or deadlines, new major events in a case, and case disposition. Automated notification would be a tremendous safeguard preventing events or deadlines from “falling through the cracks”.
- **Electronic Document Management:** The primary means by which District agencies communicate with the Court is via standardized form and report submission. Electronic exchange of forms, reports and court orders would represent a significant enhancement of these critical information-sharing activities.
- **Inquiry-level Sharing of Critical Case Information:** Case information integration across agencies in its finest form would entail pushing relevant information from one agency system in front of a case worker sharing the same client in another agency. However, pushing this type of critical case information across agency IT systems is an extremely aggressive goal. Several technological and legal hurdles need to be addressed. In the near-term, the District and Court must evaluate less complex options to allow caseworkers to pull information from across agencies.
- **Reporting:** Ensuring positive outcomes for those receiving social services from the District of Columbia is a strategic priority for all organizations. Flexible, cross-agency aggregate reporting is central to tracking the performance District overall social service system (including the Family Court), as well as identifying trends in aggregate service requirements. Fulfillment of this priority is paramount in the design of SPIS.

### **District Approach for the Development and Implementation of SPIS**

#### ***Program Management***

The proposed program management structure for the development and implementation of SPIS is presented in this report. Adapted from the structure being used to manage the District's \$65 million Administrative Services Modernization Program, the proposed SPIS structure will ensure a carefully planned and monitored implementation over the project lifecycle. Components of the management structure include a SPIS Executive Steering Committee, Executive Advisory Groups, a SPIS Program Management Office, Agency Leadership Teams, a SPIS Architecture Review Board, Business Integration Management, and a Change Control Board.

### ***Project Planning***

The District recognizes that the design and implementation of SPIS in conjunction with the District's information system integration with the Family Court IJIS system will take a great deal of project planning and resources. OCTO has developed internal expertise in the planning and management of large technological projects, as evidenced in the launch of the District's ASMP. This internal expertise is being leveraged to move forward in executing the necessary next steps towards integration of selected information systems within the District's health and human services agencies to ensure that SPIS is optimized for timely integration with IJIS. A high-level catalog of program sub-projects and their components required for the multi-year SPIS implementation is presented in this report. Rolled-up fiscal year cost estimates for SPIS development and integration with the Family Court are provided in the report, as well. The information provided regarding sub-projects and cost estimates is intended only to provide basis for the development of project funding strategies. As detailed in this report, more specific implementation planning and cost assessment activities are two of the immediate next steps in the SPIS program lifecycle.

District experience and best practice research demonstrate that large technology implementation programs in the health and human services fields are often troubled by inaccurate assumptions, legal obstacles, or unrealized technological short-comings perpetuating themselves undetected throughout the planning cycles, only to be revealed upon roll-out within the real-world environment. This report outlines a strategy for piloting the SPIS architecture in parallel with careful, long-term integration planning. By testing the SPIS architecture and functionality almost immediately, the pilot program will protect the District from having to complete costly remediation activities late in the implementation lifecycle.

Recognizing the logical progression the systems engineering lifecycle process, this report identifies the projects that will be initiated in the coming months to optimize the District environment for the long-term implementation of SPIS and integration with IJIS.

The District estimates that the baseline SPIS Integration Program will take approximately four years (FY03 through FY06) and cost \$18 million. As previously noted, the cost estimates are intended only to provide basis for the development of project funding strategies. Cost estimates take into consideration the multiple facets of the systems engineering lifecycle. The timeline and costs would build and implement most all of the SPIS/Family Court vision, including case management information sharing, cross-functional aggregate reporting, electronic forms exchange, and calendar/notification capabilities among the Family Court, CFSA, DHS/YSA and other administrations within DHS, DMH, OCC, and DCPS.

The four-year plan and \$18 million cost will deliver the District and Family Court a level of systems integration and information sharing un-paralleled within today's government health and human services fields. Given its limited population and geographic size, proximity to Federal service agencies and numerous private social service foundations, representative cross-section of health and human services challenges, and the strong central controls developed by OCTO, the District believes that it is the logical candidate to develop and implement a National model for IT integration between government health and human services agencies and the Courts.

### **Mayor's Spending Plan**

This section of the Report to Congress carries out the requirement of the Appropriations Act that the Mayor submit a plan to Congress, the President, and the Comptroller General regarding the spending of the \$700,000 appropriated for FY02 to carry out additional District responsibilities imposed by the Family Court Act. The Appropriations designated \$200,000 for preparation of the IT integration plan and \$500,000 for related costs for service improvements.